7: Thompson--372 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 769, 771, 775, 779

"Along with the first migrations from the North and West into Laos filtered the Vedic precepts and the laws of Manu. From 900 to 700 B.C. the more militant dogmas of Brahmanism began to appear, at the same time as the ancestral cult and innumerable auxiliary superstitions. About the thirteenth century Buddhism began to appear by different routes, but it is the Ceylonese variety, albeit profoundly modified, which has the largest number of Laotian followers. Chiefly because it rejects study and examination, this doctrine permits many superstitions to live side by side with it, embedded at varying depths in the popular consciousness. The kind of Buddhism practised by the Laotians and some Khas is almost entirely excempt from philosophic speculation. Bonzes recite prayers incomprehensible to themselves and to the people, but they must mark every social event. These ceremonies, a reverential attitude towards sacred places, a dash of animism, the ancestral cult, and a belief in Kharma, make up official Laotian religion. Some of this has been absorbed by the Yaos and Lus, Khas and Meos, each of whom has added their own assortment of superstitions. Laotian superstitions, too, are myriad. They attribute all evils to spirits--none other than their ancestors, who take delight in returning to earth expressly to torment their relatives. Hence the great power of sorcerers, who, incidentally, are rent by the greatest professional jealousy. All of this, with a smattering of Christian converts, form an ill-defined, uneasy pantheism, quite congenial to the Laotian soul."

25: Brodrick--96-97 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians-1-3
116, 776, 769, 782, 823

"Although the people of the Laos are happy-go-lucky and carefree, and their mild and mitigated Little Vehicle Buddhism sits lightly upon them, the spirits are ever-present. Still, to this day, in a country where men are naturally, it seems, hospitable and open-handed, no stranger will be invited until the spirits have given their permission sought by offerings to them of five candles of pure beeswax, five frangipani flowers, five incense-sticks and a bottle of rice-alcohol.

All that happens to hurt man is the work of spirits. For 'primitive' men--and the Laotians, despite their real if rustic civilization, maintain many of the reactions and fundamental beliefs of 'primitives' --disaster, and the greatest of all disasters, death, is not 'normal' or 'natural.' In the Land of the Laos, the p'hi-lok or manes of the ancestors are jealous beings, easy to take offence and these p'hi or spirits and the ho or demons must receive propitiatory sacrifices. There is a similar underlying fear and faith in Cambodia but they are better hid. But in the Laos it may be said that all believe that ghosts come back at night in animal shape to plague the living. In animal shape. The archaic ideas which we tend to label rather too easily as 'totemistic' are all vaguely interwined with feelings rather than definable dogmas, feelings of some close relation between man and other animals.

With the p'hi-lok, who sow terror, and the p'hi phob, or evil spirits, are the numberless demons of the woods and the guardian genii of the wild. The forests are fearsome

places and best avoided. The old travellers told a terrible tale of the Forest of the King of [97] Fire, the Dong-Phaja-Fai, through which you had to climb to reach Korat, (1) and

1. Korat, of course, is in modern Siam, but it is in Laotian land. Mgr. Pellegoix's entertaining Description du Royaume de Siam was published in 1854.

the journey took five whole days. The awful name, alone, of this dread jungle spread terror, and countless wayfarers never came through the deep shades, since as Pellegoix relates, in an effort, doubtless, to rationalize the legends, here and there in this jungle, the earth contains 'mineral arsenic' whose dust the passer-by breathes and with it death.

If the Laotian goes into the jungle, ill may befall him, and surely will if he there spends the night. He may disappear for ever or he may be transported to an enchanted land wherein, for long years he may chase phantoms and illusions and if he manages, at last, to escape from this bewitched realm, when he reaches his hut he will not be recognized by his relations who, having mourned him as dead, have long ceased to think of him and will be most embarrassed and annoyed at his reappearance--or, if he shuns such adventures, he will emerge from the great woods as a sick man, the demons have struck him with malignant fever, dragging him to the grave in a few short days.

Picanon told a curious tale of what he experienced, years ago, when he was living on Khone island, right in the south near the Khong cataracts and the Cambodian frontier. After a day of torrential showers and violent storms, in the evening as he was finishing his dinner in his house, two young women ran in upon him and threw themselves trembling at his feet imploring him for aid and for protection. Thinking that some brigand was after the women, Picanon reached for his gun and made to go out on to the veranda, but the girls sobbed to him not to venture forth alone for a p'hi had called to them and cursed them at the very moment they were passing the house. They tottered with him out of the windows and pointed to a bushy mango-tree in a rice-field nearby. On the tree was a bird, luminiferous in the moonlight. It flew screeching away as Picanon fired a charge of shot in its direction, and the women were reassured."

as a blessing.

One fact worthy of note is that the "Phi-pop"--men, women and even adolescents--are extremely intelligent folk with lively eyes and full of a strong will and energy. They know [Illustration here] a host of recipes and therapeutic formulas which have been handed down to them by their parents. They might be described as bonesetters or people who have medicine as a sideline, and who act on weak minds and nervous temperaments by the power of suggestion. "Phi-pop" women and girls are usually quite pretty.

One of the methods most widely used to gain the favor of the "Phis" is to play deafening music.

"It is not at all unusual to hear diabolic and uninterrupted music in a Laotian house for several days and nights running. In this house there is a person who is seriously ill. All the noise is designed to frighten or to assuage the spirit in the sick person's body and to persuade or force it to [153] leave the body of the invalid. The sick person generally succumbs under the waves of this curative but noisy harmony" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

Religion of the Thais. They have neither pagodas nor bonzes, but practice ancestor worship and have a great veneration for the "Spirits or Genii," to whom they make offerings on all occasions.

In the first room of the house there stands a bamboo altar. The "Spirits" or "Phis" of dead forbears are supposed to inhabit this altar, which is composed of two different levels, the highest one for the male Phis and the other for the female Phis. At its foot there is an opening covered with an elliptical wooden ornament shaped like a mouth. It is there, on this "ancestors' mouth," that the head of the family places offerings and prayers, especially when a member of the family is sick. In principal an animal is never killed without some scrap of food or a few drops of blood being offered to the ancestors' mouth.

"Spirits, whether genii or demons, are everywhere--in the sky, on earth, in the forests, in the water. They are the object of a widespread cult over which individuals who might be described as

771 and to which is added the pantheism of the "Phis." Their general
779 doctrine, however, includes a belief in an "element which creates all things" and in a future life, the sanction of their dogmatic taboos and precepts, in a place of eternal beatitude which it is possible to inhabit here on earth and which is, at bottom, nothing else but the annihilation of being in the "Nirvana" of the Buddhists.

Among the Lus, even more so than in China and the Indies, the basis of this mystical and dreamlike religion which is so well suited to their temperament is an idea of the nothingness of things, the uselessness of effort and even of action. It is, in a word, the most complete pessimism and the annihilation of energy and will.

775 Various beliefs. 1. The following is an incantation or prayer
• 769 for [158] dying persons which gives a good picture of the system of the world and of the idea of metempsychosis:
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The sky and the earth are growing dark;
Come out, souls, and gain "space";
The spirits of the parts of the body are joined together
and form only one;
Listen to the law of Buddha:
We teach the road which leads to the kingdom of Buddha,
the kingdom of the rising sun.
The one soul, the union of the spirits of the body, knows
today that birth and death are alike;
What is birth?
Nothingness produces the generative breath.
The breath produces fire.
Fire produces water.
Water produces earth, mother of all beings.
Birth is produced by harmony and perfect equilibrium of
the elements.
What is death?
Death is a return to the beginning by the reversal of causes.
Earth masters water.
Water masters fire.
Fire masters air.
Air masters nothingness.
Nothingness always remains nothingness.
Nothingness is infinite.

149: Reinach--118 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Death is produced by a lack of harmony and equilibrium among the elements.
Sympathy of the spirits produces a man.
Antipathy of the spirits produces a saint.
He who understands this can transform his nature and reach a point where he knows neither birth nor suffering nor death.
He will not know desire or grief!
He who, as he draws his last breath, repents of all his faults in deed, intention and thought regains his original purity. His soul goes to paradise so that, after "time" has passed, it may again be incarnated at the epoch of "rebirth" in the body of a good, just and happy man.

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2. We shall now give an extract from the work of Captain Gosselin, who gives a good definition of the spirits or souls in Laotian beliefs which are particular to each human organ and faculty. His description will be found to agree with what we have said at the beginning of this chapter.

[159] "The existence of man consists in the union of several organs, the cooperation of which helps to regularize the mechanism of vital formation. Over each of these organs presides an immortal personality which is called the soul of the organ. These souls, which are thirty-two in number, are as follows:

"The soul of hair on the head; the soul of body hair; the soul of the fingernails; the soul of the teeth; the soul of the skin; the soul of the flesh; the soul of the nerves; the soul of the bones; the soul of the cartilages; the soul of the glands; the soul of the heart; the soul of the spleen; the soul of the peritoneum; the soul of the liver; the soul of the lungs; the soul of the large intestine; the soul of the small intestine; the soul of digested food; the soul of food to be digested; and the soul of the brain.

"These twenty organs are produced by the male substances, that is to say by the father. The twelve others originate from female substances, or the mother. They are:

"The soul of the bile; the soul of glutinous matter; the soul of the synovia; the soul of the blood; the soul of the sweat; the soul of

586 the Laotians." (Le Laos français.) [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

764 Deaths. Funerals. Everything takes place among the Thais
769 as among the Laotians. The poor are buried, while well-to-do people are cremated in great pomp. Celebrations take place at which animals are sacrificed, there is a great deal to eat and quantities of rice brandy and rice beer are consumed. But here there is ancestor worship, and so the altar of the "Phis" of the house and the body itself receive offerings as long as the funeral feasts last.

After cremation, which, as in India, is practiced on a raised pyre at the bottom of a pit dug in the ground, the ashes and burnt bones are sealed in a jar with a few silver coins placed there to pay for the dead person's food during his wanderings through "space."

The jar is buried on the site of the pyre. Then [237] [Illustration] [238] [Blank page] [239] the mattresses, bolster and pillow of the deceased are placed on top, as well as food and a drinking vase full of water. All of his clothes are fastened to poles planted fan-wise on one side of the tomb. Sometimes a fence closes off the site of the tomb.

In some regions the jar containing the remains and ashes of the deceased is buried in a hidden place in the mountains, known only to the dead person's closest relatives.

This procedure, which is not a ritual one, is doubtless intended to place the mortal remains beyond the reach of any profaners of sepulchres who might be attracted by the temptation of the few coins mixed with the ashes.

Finally, a little house is often built over the tomb which is supposed to represent the dwelling place of the deceased.

527 Games, Celebrations, Festivals. Like their Laotian brothers, the Thais are great lovers of celebrations. The chief holiday, one which is celebrated in May or June every year and during which all work ceases for four days, is that of the dead or Boun-Phi-Tai.

782 Animal sacrifices are made to the different genii, and are
769 accompanied by prayers in honor of the dead. The favor of each genie or "Phi" spirit is gained by sacrificing a particular animal, as a dog for the "Phi" of tigers, chickens and pigs for the "Phis" of the mountains, a goat for those which watch over the roads leading to watercourses, and buffalo and oxen, finally, for the "Phis" of the

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village and those of ancestors. Prayers for the dead are said, and when they are over the head and feet of a goat, crude clay statuettes representing two men, two buffalo and two oxen, and numeroux wax candles are placed on a raft made of banana trees. The raft is launched full into the current of a river while men collect on the banks and fire salvos of shots and shoot off fireworks.

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The musical instruments of the Thais are the "Kene" and [240] a kind of clarinet with two tubes, reinforced by gongs and tom-toms.

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Their songs are not at all noisy and are much more like monotonous chants.

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The Thais have a very characteristic game, and this is the game of the "inexhaustible jar." A jar of rice beer is placed on the floor of a house and five bamboo tubes stuck in it to serve as straws. Five men take positions around the jar, and each of them puts a tube in his mouth. Into each of the jars, and above a kind of porous stopper made of pressed paddy husks, water is poured by means of an ox horn with a hole in the end. At a given signal both men and women begin to suck conscientiously while the contents of the ox horn are poured into each jar three times in succession. The ones who empty their jar first win, and the losers have to drink the contents of ten horns of water poured over what is left of the beer in their jar.

The Thai beer does not have a bad taste, and its alcoholic strength is equivalent to that of hard cider, which it closely resembles in flavor. Although the additions of water decrease the beverage's percentage of alcohol it nevertheless produces a slight intoxication, due primarily to the speed with which it is sucked through the straw. But the inebriety never degenerates into a quarrel, and provokes nothing but laughter, songs and unadulterated merriment.

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Who would believe that the Thais have the custom of throwing "confetti"? Nothing is more true, however, for in the celebrations at the end of harvest, which take place in December or January, the merrymakers throw cotton seeds mixed with paddy, with husks, and sometimes also with ashes.

Hill Tribes

Almost all are of low birth and are crude and illiterate. They have married Thai or Kha women and thereby founded a stock of halfbreeds. This race is destined to merge with the mass of the Laotians or Thai population and through successive crossings lose all distinctive characteristics.

The Meos. The Meos are also Yunnanese who have retained a degree of independence and have not been marked with the Chinese imprint like the Hos or adopted baggy clothes and the custom of wearing their hair only in a braid.

They are distributed in groups of a few families each of which live on the peaks of the mountains in northern Laos and the Sib-Song Chau-Thais. They can be divided into three great families--the blacks, the whites and the reds--which owe their names to the color of certain parts of the women's costume. Thus among the black and red Meos skirts or jackets are light blue in color, but the latter have a wide collar ornamented with black or red embroidery. Finally, a small turban with black and white checks or of red material, depending on the case, completes their garb. Among the white Meos, the women wear a skirt and jacket of unbleached cloth, with a white and blue embroidered collar.

The men's clothing is light blue in all cases. It is composed of a broad pair of trousers which come down somewhat below the calf, where the legs are drawn tight, and of a short, tight-sleeved jacket which buttons down one side.

A turban winds around the head and covers their long hair, which may be rolled or braided.

The women's hair is parted and wound on the upper part of the nape of the neck in a coil. (1)

(1) See Appendix XIX.

The Meos practice ancestor worship primarily, like many Asian peoples. They have no pagodas or bonzes, but elders perform the office of priests and also administer justice.

[268] The Meos bury their dead, and make animal sacrifices on the occasion of births, marriages and deaths so as to gain the favor of the "Phis" or multiple and varied genii in whose existence and influence they believe.

Marriage is as simple as among the other peoples of Laos.

Divorce may occur either through mutual consent or in the case of adultery.